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ABSTRACT

The relationship of one aspect of conversational style, the degree of directness in the sending and interpretation of messages, to ethnicity was investigated in a comparison of the communication styles of Greeks and Americans. It was hypothesized that Greeks tend to be more indirect in speech than Americans, and that English speakers of Greek ancestry may have Greek communicative styles. These hypotheses were tested through observation of interactions, interviews with Greeks and Americans with bicultural experience about their interaction experiences, and a questionnaire based on an actual conversation. It is concluded from the findings that conversational style, which is strongly influenced by family communicative habits, is more resistant to change than more apparent marks of ethnicity such as retention of parents' language. Furthermore, understanding the patterns of retention or loss of ethnically-related communicative strategies can offer insight into the assimilation from Greeks to Greek-Americans. (MSE)

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I once began a paper on misunderstandings due to differences in conversational style by referring to the following experience. While staying with a family on the island of Crete, I found that no matter how early I awoke, my hostess managed to have a plate of scrambled eggs sitting on the table for me by the time I was up and dressed. And at dinner every evening, dessert included a pile of purple seeded grapes. Now I don't happen to like seeded grapes or scrambled eggs, but I had to eat them both because they had been set out--at great inconvenience to my hosts--especially for me. It turned out that I was getting eggs scrambled because I had asked, while watching my hostess in the kitchen, whether she ever made eggs by beating them, and I was getting grapes out of season because I had asked at dinner one evening how come I hadn't seen grapes since I had arrived in Greece. My hosts had taken these careless questions as hints--that is, indirect expressions of my desires. In fact, I had not intended to hint anything, but had merely been trying to be friendly, to make conversation.

As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Tannen 1975), "communication mixups" like these are commonplace between members of what appear to (but may not necessarily) be the same culture. However, such misunderstandings are especially characteristic of cross-cultural communication. Cultures differ with respect to what is considered appropriate to say (Polanyi in press) and how it is deemed appropriate to say it. A recent burgeoning of interest in studying conversation has begun to show how complex the matter of "how to say it" really is.

John Gumperz (1977) has analyzed in detail the use of paralinguistic and prosodic features such as intonation, loudness, pitch, pauses, and so on (which he calls "contextualization cues") in conversation to signal what is being done by talk (i.e. what "speech activity" is being engaged in) and how any specific conversational contribution is to be understood (a process he calls "conversational inference"). These phenomena, as Gumperz (1978) notes, "are learned in the course of previous interactive experience. To the extent that such interactive experience is a function of home background, and insofar as home background relates to ethnicity, knowledge of such rhetorical conventions is ethnically determined." Hence research has shown that these subtly calibrated monitoring devices which make conversation possible, break down between speakers of different ethnic background.

In a larger sense, it is the very sharing of such strategies that creates the feeling of satisfaction which accompanies and follows successful conversation: the sense of being "on the same wave length," of being understood, of belonging, therefore of sharing identity. Conversely, a lack of sharedness of such strategies creates the opposite feeling: of dissonance, of not being understood, of not belonging--therefore of not sharing identity. This is the sense in which conversational style is a major component of what we have come to call ethnicity.

I want to stress that these processes operate on an unconscious level. While everyone can easily see that different languages have different words for the same object, ways of signalling intentions and attitudes generally seem self-evident, "natural," and "real." For example, if I habitually raise my voice when I am angry (and members of my family do and have always done so), then when I hear others raising their voices, I will assume that they are angry. But this might be a false assumption, for example if I overhear animated

discussion among Greeks.¹ Since people speaking other languages DO raise their voices, I have much opportunity to exercise and thereby reinforce my old interpretive habits.

The aspect of conversational style I will discuss here is modes of indirectness--the tendency to "give out hints" and "look for hints" in certain situations, and how those hints are to be encoded and understood. Relative indirectness may be seen as a position on a continuum (Tannen 1975), one end of which represents absolutely direct communication--saying just what you mean and no more--while the other represents absolutely indirect communication--never saying anything like what you mean. The poles do not exist as communicative styles; everyone falls somewhere on the continuum, with their characteristic styles representing a range on the continuum rather than a point (Lakoff 1978).

Although a given statement may be relatively "direct," no one is always direct. Indirectness is the necessary result of the basic human desires for rapport and defensiveness. Rapport is the lovely satisfaction of being understood without explaining oneself, of getting what one wants without asking for it. Defensiveness is the need to save face by reneging in case one's conversational contribution is not received well--the ability to say, perhaps sincerely, "I never said that," or "That's not what I meant." (See Tannen 1975, 1976, and in prep/a for discussion for the uses of indirectness. Brown and Levinson 1978, also building upon Lakoff's work, present a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic effects of these two overriding human goals, which they call positive and negative politeness).

In the remainder of this paper I will present my research investigating indirectness among Greeks, Americans, and Greek-Americans,² thus tracing the process of adaptation of this controversial strategy as an element of ethnicity.

I will discuss findings from a number of research methods: 1) observation of interaction, 2) interviews with others about their interactional experience, 3) a pilot study consisting of a questionnaire based on an actual conversation, including a) quantitative results, b) short answer results, and c) open-ended interview/discussion with respondents.

Observation of Interaction

Based on my own experience living in Greece for two and a half years, it seemed to me that Greeks tended to be indirect--to communicate meaning and look for others' meaning through "hints"--more often and in different ways than I had learned to expect. The sour grapes and scrambled eggs example was typical. Comments made by Greek people in conversation corroborated this impression.

For example, a Greek woman of about 55 told me that before she had married she had had to ask her father's permission before doing anything. She mentioned that of course he never explicitly denied her permission. But if she asked whether she could go to a party and he answered,

An thes, pas. ("If you want, go.")

she knew that she could not go. If he really meant that she could go, he would say,

Nai. Na pas. ("Yes. Go.")

She added that her husband responds to her requests in the same way. Thus she agrees to do what her husband prefers without expecting him to express his preference directly; thus she lets him rule her without appearing to.³

Others' Experiences

I began systematic study of comparative communicative strategies by asking Greeks and Americans who had had bicultural experience for examples of misunderstandings that had arisen between themselves and members of the other group. (Tannen 1975, 1976, in prep/a). One such example was reported by a bicultural

couple:

Wife: We didn't go to the party because you didn't want to.

Husb: I wanted to. You didn't want to.

This difference of interpretation was traced back to the following conversations:

I. Wife: John's having a party. Wanna go?

Husb: OK.

II. (Later)

Wife: Are you sure you want to go to the party?

Husb: OK, let's not go. I'm tired anyway.

In discussing this misunderstanding, the American⁴ wife reported that she had merely been asking what her husband wanted to do without considering her own preference. Since she was about to go to this party just for him, she tried to make sure that that was his preference by asking directly a second time. She was being very solicitous and considerate. The Greek husband said that by bringing up the question of the party, the wife was letting him know that she wanted to go, so he agreed to go. Then when she brought it up again, she was letting him know that she didn't want to go; she had obviously changed her mind. So he came up with a reason not to go, to make her feel all right about getting her way. (This is precisely the strategy reported by the Greek woman who did what her father or husband wanted without expecting them to tell her directly what that was.) Thus the Greek husband in the party example was also being very solicitous and considerate. All this considerateness, however, only got them what neither wanted, because they were expecting to receive information in a way different from the way the other was sending it out.

This example is classic, furthermore, because it demonstrates the difficulty, if not impossibility, of clearing up misunderstandings caused by such stylistic differences. In seeking to clarify, each speaker continues to use the very strategy which confused the other in the first place. (See Watzlawick,

Beavin and Jackson 1967 for discussion of this pattern of communication which Bateson 1972 identified as "complementary schismogenesis.")

In the party example, the American wife reports that her strategy was "direct": her question was a request for information; if she had wished to communicate her preference, she would have stated it outright. The Greek husband reports that his strategy was "indirect": the wife's question was seen to reveal an underlying preference which would not be stated outright. In order to test my hypothesis that these strategies represent trends typical of Greeks and Americans, I presented the above conversation in written form in Greek to Greeks and in English to Americans and questioned them about their interpretations.⁵ Let me emphasize once more, that this questionnaire was designed to test only the interpretive patterns, since what people might say can be learned only from observing actual interaction, and second to test their expectations about this specific situation: conversation between a couple who are intimately acquainted.

Pilot Study Results

The written questionnaire (see Appendix A) begins by presenting the first part of the party negotiation:⁶

Wife: John's having a party. Wanna go?
Husb: OK.

It then asks which of the two paraphrases represents what the husband probably meant when he said "OK":

1-I (Indirect): My wife wants to go to this party, since she asked.
I'll go to make her happy.

1-D (Direct): My wife is asking if I want to go to a party. I feel
like going, so I'll say yes.

1-I represents, roughly, what the Greek husband reported he had meant in the conversation, while 1-D represents what the American wife reported she had thought he meant. A comparison of the percentage of respondents in the three

Quantitative results, then, corroborated the impression that more Greeks than Americans opted for the "indirect" interpretation, and that Greek-Americans were in between slightly closer to Greeks. Since the samples were small, these results are not offered as "proof;" they are, however, an indication of the patterns of differences which emerge unmistakably from the answers to substantive questions in the short answer and interview sections of the pilot study.

Short Answer Results

Even more revealing than percentages of respondents choosing particular paraphrases, is their explanations of why they chose them, and alternatives which they reported would have led them to the other interpretation. The differences in interpretations hinged, for the most part, on two aspects of the conversation: the wife's asking the question and the husband's response.

Paraphrase 1-I indicates that the wife's question "means" she wants to go to the party. The reasoning given by Greeks to explain their choice of 1-I is that if the wife didn't want to go, she would not have brought it up in the first place. Greeks and Americans and probably members of any culture are capable of interpreting a question either as a request for information or as an expression of some unstated meaning. However, members of one culture or another may be more likely to interpret a question--or any other conversational contribution--in one way or another. Esther Goody (1978), in trying to discover why people of Gonja do not ask information questions in teaching and learning situations, concludes that, for those situations, Gonjans are "trained early on to attend above all to the command function of questioning. The pure information question hasn't got a chance!" (p. 40). Similarly, I suggest, people in Greece are more disposed to attend to the indirect request function of questions in certain situations (specifically, in-group talk) than some Americans.

Enthusiasm Constraint

Respondents' comments explaining why they chose one or the other paraphrase often focused on the husband's choice of "OK." Americans who thought the husband really wanted to go to the party explained that OK = yes. (24% of the Americans said this.) But if they thought the husband was going along with his wife's preference, the Americans still focused on "OK" as the cue. In this case they explained that "OK" lacks enthusiasm. (20% said this.)

The expectation of enthusiasm was stronger for Greeks than for Americans. Whereas some Americans pointed to the affirmative nature of "OK," not a single Greek did so.⁷ In contrast, fully half of the Greeks who explained their choices referred to the fact that "OK" was an unenthusiastic response. This is more than double the percentage of Americans (20%) who said this. The "enthusiasm constraint" (Tannen 1976) is in keeping with the findings of Vassiliou, Triandis, Vassiliou and McGuire (1972) in their research on "subjective culture." They conclude that Greeks put value on enthusiasm and spontaneity (as opposed to American emphasis on planning and organization), and they observe that such differences in expectations may contribute to the formation of ethnic stereotypes.

Related to the enthusiasm constraint--perhaps another aspect of it--is the "brevity effect." Many respondents referred to the "brevity" of the husband's response when they explained their paraphrase choices. However, if Americans made reference to his "brevity," they uniformly said that it showed he was being informal, casual, and hence sincere. Brevity then was the reason for taking the direct interpretation. This explanation is based on a strategy which assumes people will say what they mean in an in-group setting. (28%--more than 1/4--of the American respondents took this approach.) In stark contrast, any Greeks who mentioned the brevity of the husband's answer "OK,"

pointed to it as a sign of unwillingness. This presupposes that resistance to another's perceived preference will not be verbalized directly, so it will be shown by terseness--a strategy like, "If you can't say something good, don't say anything." (20% of Greek respondents who explained their choices took this approach.)⁸

The explanations given by Greek-Americans of why they chose interpretations were a blend of typical Greek and typical American explanations. They gave the explanation that brevity implies lack of enthusiasm (whereas no Americans did), and also that brevity is casual (whereas no Greeks did), in roughly the same proportions (23% and 20% respectively). Only two (7%) said that OK = yes, whereas no Greek and 24% of Americans said this. Thus, Greek-Americans were closer to Greeks than Americans in their interpretive style.

Sociocultural Expectations

People's expectations about how others will talk are inextricably intertwined with their expectations about how others will or should act. Thus one Greek commented, "Women generally want to go out but they ask indirectly rather than demanding." While the comment, "women generally ask indirectly," is a comment about conversational style (and one that corroborates the present hypothesis), the assumption that "they generally want to go out" is an expectation based on social rather than linguistic information. A similar analysis was explained with artful elaboration by another Greek respondent. Following is a translation into English of a section of his comment. (See Appendix B for transcription of the complete section in Greek.)

Respondent: She's in the house all week . . . Because if I'm married and my wife doesn't work, all day she's at home. If she has a child, too, all right? she can't go out. She'll go to the store, she'll take the child too. She'll go to the grocer, she'll take the child too, and she'll take care to clean the house all day. This is a natural conse-

quence, for her to be in the house all day. In the evening when I return from work, I'll go home tired, I'll sit there, I won't go out at all, because I'm tired, and this will happen every day. Therefore a woman has to go out. If not two days, one day a week. Okay? So. Let's go to the party, so my wife can enjoy herself.

It is clear that this respondent's choice of the indirect interpretation is based not on an interpretation of the words presented, but on the socio-cultural knowledge brought to the task. In this connection, Greeks were more likely to assume that the wife would want to go to a party, and furthermore to refer overtly to this assumption in answering the questionnaire. The nature of the questionnaire/interview setting to some extent defines the speech event at hand. Thus it may be that Americans considered it appropriate to try to be as "literal" as possible in their responses. Greeks, on the other hand, showed readiness to personalize, to answer the question in terms of their own past or projected experience. Many Greeks commented that they chose 1-I because, for example, "That's how my husband does it."

The Greek whose explanation was quoted in part above was unmarried, but he instantiated the party conversation by projecting himself into it. He even went on to worry about who would babysit for the child and whether or not he would dance with his wife at the party. These two styles--the Americans' tendency to try to "be objective" and Greeks' to personalize--emerged in another study (Tannen 1978 and in prep./b) in which Greeks and Americans told what they had seen in a film. There, as here, the choice of these approaches represents conventionalized, situation-specific strategies which make up conversational style.

Discussion/Interview Results

The most interesting results came in the form of comments made by respondents in discussion following their completion of the questionnaire.⁹ For example, at a small informal meeting, Greek and Greek-American women had filled out my questionnaires; before leaving them, I explained briefly the purpose of the study and its preliminary findings. There arose a general chorus of exclamations of recognition and agreement. An American-born woman's voice prevailed: "Boy, is that right! With Greeks no matter what they say, you NEVER know what's going on up here!" She poked her head with her index finger. A Greek-born woman objected: "But my husband doesn't do that. He always says what he means." "But YOU married a Greek-American!" the first woman reminded her. "I married a GREEK!"

On another occasion, a Greek-born commentator reported that as she periodically returned to Greece for visits after she had moved to the United States, she became increasingly frustrated with her former compatriots. She found herself wondering, "What are they getting at?" and "Where are they getting THAT from?" This woman, a professional psychologist, was intrigued by the idea of using the conversational interpretation questionnaire as a test of assimilation, for she thought it might prove to be more revealing than currently used tests such as the question, "Do you go to dances at the church?" which she reported have not turned out to be valid indicators. I too found that involvement in Greek-identified social organizations was not related to responses to my questionnaire. Seaman (1972) discussed this issue as well, concluding, along with other researchers whom he cites, that attendance at social organizations may represent adaptation to an American rather than a Greek pattern of socialization.

It is possible that a good bicultural, like a good bilingual, sees both possibilities and adapts. For example, an American-born woman of Greek grandparents said that she had to check both interpretations on the questionnaire. She explained that if she projected herself into the position of the wife, she would take the indirect interpretation, but if she imagined her husband doing the asking, she would take the direct interpretation.¹⁰ (Her husband is not Greek.) She further commented that she tends to be indirect because she gets it from her mother, who got it from her own mother. In the same spirit, another Greek-American woman laughed when she read Paraphrase 2-I, saying, "That sounds just like my grandmother."

It is far from certain, however, that awareness of the existence of differences in communicative strategies makes them less troublesome, since their operation remains unconscious and habitual. Again, a personal testimony is most eloquent--that of a young professional man living in the New York City area, whose grandparents were from Greece. He seemed "fully assimilated." He did not speak Greek; he had not grown up in a Greek neighborhood; his social network included few Greek-Americans. However, in filling out the questionnaire, he chose 1-I (the initial indirect interpretation). In later discussion he said that the notion of indirectness "rang such a bell." He commented, ". . . to a great extent being Greek implies a certain feeling of differentness with regard to understanding others which I have some trouble with." He elaborated on what he meant by this: "I was trying to get at the idea of . . . this very thing that we talked about (indirectness) and I see it as either something heroically different or a real impediment. And I'm not sure which. Most of the time I think of it as a problem. And I can't really sort it out from my family and background." "I don't know if it's Greek," he said. "I just know that it's me. And it feels a little better to know that it's Greek."

Conclusion

This discussion has centered on one component of conversational style: modes of indirectness, examined in the context of one situation: a negotiation between husband and wife about whether to go to a party. The analysis has reflected conversational style as observed and reported, as well as interpretive style as tapped by the pilot study questionnaire, and actual interactive experience as reported by respondents in extended interview/discussions. These results indicate how respondents say they would interpret a conversation. We can assume, for one thing, that intonation, facial expression, past experience with the speaker and others, and myriad other factors influence how anyone reacts in actual interaction. Moreover, whenever people talk to other people, they communicate not only the content of their message, but an image of themselves (Goffman 1959). Thus my respondents must have referred for their answers not only to their experience but also (probably more) to their notion of social norms. Eventually, such an approach must be combined with tape-recordings (or, ideally, video-tapes) of actual interaction.

Conversational style--the ways it seems natural to express and interpret meaning in conversation--is learned through previous communicative experience and therefore is strongly influenced by family communicative habits. As the articulate young Greek-American man put it, one "can't really sort it out from . . . family and background." In other words, conversational style is both a consequence and indicator of ethnicity. Conversational style includes both how meaning is expressed and which meaning is expressed--for example, the tendency to personalize, which was seen above, or whether and when it is appropriate to talk about feelings and subjective judgments. All of these conversational strategies create impressions about the speaker--judgments which are made ultimately not about "how s/he talks" but about what kind of person s/he is.

Conversational style, therefore, has much to do with the formation of ethnic stereotypes.

Just as the couple in the party example (and numerous other couples, according to their reports to me) continue to systematically misunderstand each other, we may assume that repeated interaction does not in itself lead to "better understanding." On the contrary, it tends to reinforce mistaken judgments of the other's intentions and increase expectations that the other will behave in a certain way. Vassiliou et. al. (1972) discover this in their research on Greek-American culture contact as well. Misjudgment is calcified by the conviction of repeated experience.

I suggest, then, that conversational style is more resistant to change than more apparent marks of ethnicity, such as retention of the parents' or grandparents' language. Seaman (1972) demonstrates that the modern Greek language is "practically extinct" among third generation Greek-Americans and will be "totally extinct in the fourth generation" (p. 204). However, those very third generation Greek-Americans who have lost the Greek language, may not have lost--or not lost entirely--Greek communicative strategies. Understanding these strategies, and the patterns of their retention or loss, can offer insight into the process of assimilation from Greeks to Greek-Americans.

Notes

* I am grateful to those who generously made helpful comments on an earlier draft: Wallace Chafe, David Gordon, John Gumperz and Bambi Schieffelin, and to all my informants, far too numerous to name, but including: Pam Fahlund, Jim Garofallou, Mathilde Paterakis, Theoni Velli-Spyropoulos, Georgette Stratos; Daughters of Penelope District 5; Pastor Peter Vourliotis, Faye Masterson and Women's Ministries of the Greek Assembly of God, Oakland, Ca.; Father Tom Paris, Mary Alevizos and the Philoptochos Society of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Ascension, Oakland, Ca.; John Kaiteris and the Hellenic American Neighborhood Action Committee, New York, NY; the Milvia Street Block Association, Berkeley, CA. Finally, thanks to Angeliki Nikolopoulou for her willing availability to render emergency native speaker judgments.

¹ Gumperz (1978) has shown that speakers of Indian English use loudness as a strategy to get the floor but are systematically misunderstood by speakers of British English to be showing anger.

² I do not mean to imply that there exists a single homogeneous "Greek" or "American" culture. I will use "Greeks" and "Americans" to refer to those Greeks and Americans who took part in the present study. Similarly, "Greek-American" can apply to any of a great variety of people. For the present study, I defined "Greek-American" as someone born in the U.S. of parents or grandparents born in Greece or Greek communities of Turkey and Egypt. Half of those who participated had parents born in Greece; six had one parent born in Greece and the other born in the U.S. of Greek parents. The remaining nine respondents had Greek grandparents.

³ As a linguist, I am moved to analyze the differences in the two forms of response. The intonation in the second case (Nai. Na pas.) is certain and assertive, whereas in the first it rises with the conditional clause, creating a "tentative" feeling (An thes, pas.) "Pas" ("Go"), in the first case, is imperative, but "Na pas" ("Go") in the second seems more imperative, for it carries a sense of "you should go."

It is not my task here to consider the psychological effect of using one or another communicative strategy, much as this example sets one to thinking about it.

⁴ In this example the "American" wife was a native New Yorker of East European Jewish extraction. It is highly likely that this background has influenced her seemingly "direct" style. I expect to find, in project that what seems like "directness" in the style associated with this ethnic group is in fact different application of indirectness: different modes of indirectness and different notions of context-bound appropriateness.

⁵ It would have been preferable to present the conversation as an oral interaction (i.e. on tape). However, in the interest of keeping Greek and English versions as comparable as possible, I thought it too risky to include intonation and the other nuances of spoken language about which we know so little. Even with written translation, I do not assume that the Greek and English versions are equivalent. The present study in itself is evidence that the same words do not have the same uses and therefore cannot have the same meanings in different cultures.

The Greek sample consists of people born and raised in Greece, now living in the Bay Area of California. Many of them were young men who had come to the U.S. to study, or women who were contacted through church organizations. In all cases, Greek respondents have been exposed to American communicative systems. That differences still emerge, is a testament to the strength of the effect. I would predict that Greeks sampled in Greece would show more marked preferences for indirect interpretations than those evidenced here.

Greek-Americans in this study were living in New York City. Most were contacted through the Hellenic American Neighborhood Action Committee or through church organizations. The fact that Greek-Americans from New York are compared to Americans from California is clearly a weakness of the study; however, it was not possible to find California Greek-Americans who had grown up in distinctly Greek communities. The fact that Greeks from New York turn out to show more likelihood of taking the indirect interpretation than Americans from California is, again, testimony to the strength of the effect of their ethnicity. Furthermore, it would be preferable to separate results of those with parents born in Greece from those with grandparents born in Greece. There is indeed an indication that those whose parents were born in Greece were more likely to take the indirect interpretation.

6 I added a third sentence to show that at this point the couple had decided to go: "Wife: I'll call and tell him we're coming." Few respondents commented on this sentence.

7 In an earlier study (Tannen 1976) I presented two different forms of this conversation with a rating-scale questionnaire. One version had the husband saying "OK" and the other had him saying "Yeah." The Greek versions had endaxi and nai ("ok" and the informal way of saying "yes"). When reading the conversation with the husband answering endaxi, more respondents thought "The wife wants to go" and "The husband wants to do whatever his wife wants." In contrast, the substitution of "yeah" for "ok" produced almost no difference in the American responses. This may be another reflection of the "enthusiasm constraint" operating for Greeks. It shows that pragmatic application of "ok" is not the same as that of endaxi; hence they do not "mean" the same thing.

8 The brevity effect provides an interesting comment on Basil Bernstein's controversial hypothesis about restricted and elaborated code. While I have no wish to endorse Bernstein's notions about social class, the "brevity effect" seems to indicate that subcultural groups may well differ with respect to when they expect "elaboration." What emerges here indicates that speakers of "standard English" of middle class background use what might be called a "restricted code" in in-group talk, while Greek speakers expect more "elaboration" in that setting. I am grateful to David Gordon and John Gumperz for this insight.

9 My use of discussion/interviews with respondents resembles the case study approach used by Mirra Komarovsky in *Blue Collar Marriage* (1962). I was not aware of her work when I did my own, and I am grateful to Don Forman for pointing it out to me.

10 This also highlights an aspect of the questionnaire which is different for male and female respondents. Women and men are both asked to interpret

the meaning of the husband's comment, while it is likely that women "identify" with the wife and men "identify" with the husband. Future studies will attempt to correct this bias by asking for interpretations of both speakers.

I doubt that this respondent was aware that in answering in terms of her own family she was exhibiting a "typically Greek" style.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

A couple had the following conversation:

Wife: John's having a party. Wanna go?

Husband: OK.

Wife: I'll call and tell him we're coming.

Based on this conversation only, put a check next to the statement which you think explains what the husband really meant when he answered "OK."

_____ My wife wants to go to this party, since she asked. I'll go to make her happy.

_____ My wife is asking if I want to go to a party. I feel like going, so I'll say yes.

What is it about the way the wife and the husband spoke, that gave you that impression? (Use the other side if you need more room to write.)

What would the wife or husband have had to have said differently, in order for you to have checked the other statement?

Later, the same couple had this conversation:

Wife: Are you sure you want to go to the party?

Husband: OK, let's not go. I'm tired anyway.

Based on both conversations which you read, put a check next to the statement that you think explains what the husband really meant when he spoke the second time:

_____ It sounds like my wife doesn't really want to go, since she's asking about it again. I'll say I'm tired, so we don't have to go, and she won't feel bad about preventing me from going.

_____ Now that I think about it again, I don't really feel like going to a party because I'm tired.

What is it about the way the husband or wife spoke that gave you that impression?

What would they have had to have said differently, in order for you to have checked the other statement?

Has the wife changed her mind about wanting to go to the party? _____

Your age _____ Sex _____ Have you ever been married or something like it?

Appendix B

Text of comments of Greek respondent to question, "What is it about the way the husband or wife spoke that made you choose Paraphrase 1-I?" Translation into English follows transliteration. (Excerpt)

Respondent: Einai sto spiti oli tin evdomada. Oli tin evdomada einai exo apo douleia. Thelei na . . . theilei na pai ligo na xeskasi.

I: Afto den einai apo ton tropo me ton opoio to eipe . . . einai apo tin katastasi.

R: No. Apo tin ikanopoiisi. Thelei na ikanopoiithi. Yiati otan ego eimai pantremenos kai i gynaika mou den doulevei . . . oli mera einai sto spiti. An echei kai paidi all right? den borei na vgi exo. Tha paei sto bakali, tha pari kai to paidi. Tha paei sto manavi, tha pari kai to paidi kai tha prosechi na katharis; oli mera to spiti. Einai fysiki afti synepeia na einai oli mera, fysika, mes sto spiti. Opote to vrady afou tha yyriso apo douleia, tha pao spiti kourasmenos, tha kathiso ekei, den tha vgo katholou exo, epeidi eimai kourasmenos kai afto tha yynetai kathe mera. Epomenos i gynaika, prepei na vgi exo. An oli dyo imeres, toulacheiston mia mera tin evdomada. Entaxe? Loipon. Pame sto party na diaskedasi i gynaika mou. Tora yia to paidi den xeroume pou tha meini. Isos na echoume ena babysitter i na to afisoume stin pethera mou . . . I stin pethera mou, i stin mana mou, na pame na diaskedasoume. Fysika, borei ego na min chorepso poly tin gynaika mou. Pithanon na min mou aresi o choros all right? Alla otan tha mou aresi o choros, tha . . . pithanon na proteino ego stin gynaika mou.

(In English translation, underlined were spoken in English.)

Respondent: She's in the house all week. All week she's not working. She wants . . . she wants to go to break out a bit.

I: That's not from the way she spoke; it's from the situation . . .

R: No. From contentment. She wants to be content. Because if I'm married and my wife doesn't work . . . all day she's in the house. If she has a child too all right? she can't go out. She'll go to the grocer, she'll take the child along. She'll go to the greengrocer, she'll take the child too, and she'll take care to clean the house all day. This is a natural consequence for her to be all day, naturally, in the house. So at night when I return from work, I'll go home tired, I'll sit there, I won't go out at all, because I'm tired and this will happen every day. Therefore a woman has to go out. If not two days, at least one day a week. Okay? Well. Let's go to the party so my wife can enjoy herself. Now about the child we don't know where it will stay. Maybe we'll have a babysitter or leave it with my mother-in-law . . . Either with my mother-in-law or with my mother, so we can go enjoy ourselves. Naturally. I may not dance much with my wife. I may not like dancing all right? But if I like dancing, I will . . . I may accompany my wife.

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RELEVANCE STATEMENT: Tannen

This paper deals with conversational style and more precisely with one aspect of conversational style--indirectness--the sending and the interpretation of messages as hints and suggestions rather than as outright, direct statements of intent. Conversational indirectness is related to ethnicity. The author draws on her own research to show that Greeks tend to be more indirect in speech than Americans. Examples of misunderstanding between Greeks and Americans are analyzed and the communicative patterns of Greek-Americans are discussed.

The United States is a complex NON-melting pot of ethnic groups, cultures, and communicative styles. Communicative style is not to be equated with language; in fact, as this paper demonstrates, speakers of English, of Greek ancestry, may have Greek communicative styles. In any classroom, a teacher is likely to find a variety of communicative styles and therefore a potential for misunderstandings among students and between teachers and students. Differences between communicative styles can involve intonation patterns, gestures, loudness, and tone of voice, as well as subtleties in the selection of vocabulary or syntactic pattern.